

Abstract 203

TITLE: Partner Counseling and Referral Services: An Integral Part of a Comprehensive HIV Prevention Program

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ISSUE: In 1988, the Public Health Foundation published, *Guide to Public Health Practice: HIV Partner Notification Strategies*. In late 1998, CDC released a guidance for *HIV Partner Counseling and Referral Services* (PCRS). This guidance reflects what has been learned over the past ten years including the need for community support and provides specific standards to be followed by CDC supported HIV prevention programs, emphasizing the role of PCRS in a comprehensive HIV prevention program.

SETTING: PCRS is intended to be available for all HIV-infected persons.

PROJECT: Partner counseling in HIV prevention was not initially supported by the community. This has changed somewhat with new therapeutic approaches to managing HIV infection and improved intervention programs for HIV-infected individuals. PCRS is intended to provide services to HIV-infected persons and their partners to help either avoid infection or prevent transmission to others and help partners gain earlier access to important services. The term "partner counseling and referral services" more accurately reflects the range of services available to HIV-infected persons, their partners, and affected communities through this public health activity. PCRS is delivered in a continuum of care that includes the capacity to refer sex and needle-sharing partners to important services. PCRS should not be a one-time service. It should be offered as soon as a HIV-infected individual learns his or her serostatus and made available throughout that person's counseling and treatment. HIV-infected individuals should have the ability to access PCRS whenever needed.

RESULTS: CDC's guidance is based on 13 principles and provides 18 standards. The guidance emphasizes confidentiality, the voluntary nature of PCRS, and the need for cultural appropriateness.

LESSONS LEARNED: While standards are important to ensure the successful implementation of PCRS, support from the community and those served by PCRS are essential for its success. Some community leaders remain apprehensive about confidentiality issues and the extent to which it is voluntary. PCRS providers must continue to work with community leaders to increase or maintain community support.

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